

PEOPLE - HANIGAN

Duxbury Clipper

Wednesday, September 15, 2004

The Clipper Visits...

Marianne Hanigan

By MARTHA HIMES

They say optimistic people live longer, and Marianne Hanigan is living proof.

Hanigan, 100 years old this past June, has maintained her positive outlook despite sorrows that might have sunk others into depression. Determined and independent, she taught herself to sail in her sixties and sailed alone in the bay until she was 95. When she became her family's sole support, she decided

continued on page 20



Marianne Hanigan stills sees the glass as half full.

The Clipper Visits...Marianne Hanigan

continued from page one

to become a librarian and accomplished the necessary schoolwork in nine months.

Now she's a little hard of hearing and her speech isn't always clear, due to a stroke in 1995, but her sense of humor is sharp and her happy spirit unflagging.

As a child, Hanigan grew up in Jamaica Plain, but her family summered in Duxbury. They loved the town - "We were all alone in the woods," she reminisced - but Duxbury held another benefit besides verdant isolation: it cured her father's tuberculosis.

Timothy Coughlin suffered from such severe tuberculosis he had been hospitalized in Lakeville Sanatorium and given six months to live. However, his wife Catherine noticed that his lungs improved during their Duxbury summers. So when Marianne was about 12, the family moved to Duxbury for good, into a house off of Bay Road.

By then, the Coughlins had already lost two sons in infancy: Herbert, of influenza, and Jacky, of a ruptured appendix. Marianne and her sister Ruth were all that remained of the couple's four children.



THE NEWLYWEDS: Marianne & Bill Hanigan pose in their wedding finery on the steps of a church in Kingston where they were married on July 6, 1929.

The two sisters attended Partridge Academy and joined Duxbury's Girl Scout troop, one of the first in the nation, in 1912. The troop met in the GAR Hall. "There were only about twelve of us," she said.



Marianne Coughlin Hanigan, 1922.

At sixteen, Hanigan attended Burdett College in Boston, with the intention of becoming a secretary. Shortly after she started college, however, she lost her sister Ruth, whose heart, weakened by a childhood bout of rheumatic fever, finally gave out. Ruth died at 15 in 1921.

After completing her studies at Burdett, the young scholar decided to go back to school to become a teacher. At 19, she graduated from the Hyannis Normal School, returned to her parents' home, and started her teaching career at the Ashdod School.

"I learned how to drive, and I drove back and forth in my Whippet," she said. "For five years, I taught in Duxbury."

Hanigan taught at the Ashdod School until 1926. In 1927 and 1928, she taught at the Tarkiln Primary School.

Around that time, she met her future husband, William Hanigan, a fellow teacher six years older than she who lived on Surplus Street. "Until that time, I wasn't interested in boys," she said, and had only dated occasionally. "I was an attractive enough girl, but I wasn't bold." She married William Hanigan in 1929; the couple moved to West Roxbury.

Hanigan quit teaching when she married, while her husband taught at the Boston Trade School, Wentworth Institute and the Franklin Institute. They bought a house on Church Street in West Roxbury, "a lovely little home," Hanigan said, with a mortgage that they managed to pay off in nine years, despite the Depression.

In the mid-1930s, the Hanigans had two children, Ruth and Bill, in quick succession, about 16 months apart.

But after 15 happy years of marriage, William Hanigan had a heart attack. "He died after 15 years and in 15 minutes," Hanigan said angrily, but quickly regained her optimism enough to add, "The house was all paid for, fortunately."

Left with two small children, Hanigan went back to school again, this time to Simmons College, to become a librarian. In nine months, she completed her coursework and became certified as a librarian.

Her first job was at the

Dorchester High School for Boys, where she started the first library in the Boston high school system. "No high school had a library until I went in," she said. Her son Bill, sitting in on our conversation, added, "That's why Boston was looking for a bunch of librarians. All the high schools were going to have them. It was the right place at the right time."

She worked for Dorchester High for 11 years, until about 1957 or 1958, when she heard about an opening at Rockland High School. She applied for the job and was hired on the spot at her interview.

"It was a brand new school and he had no idea where he'd get a librarian," she said.

By then, Hanigan's children were grown and out of the house, and her parents were aging. She sold the house in West Roxbury and moved back in with her parents in their house off of Bay Road. "It was a very happy arrangement," she said, that lasted until her mother died in 1968 at the age of 90 and her father died in 1970 at 93.

Once she moved back to Duxbury, Hanigan decided she needed to learn to sail. So she bought a small sailboat, a twelve-foot O'Day widgeon, and taught herself to sail.

"I took my boat and went out. I wanted to turn around and I didn't know how to do it. There was a husband and wife following me. I didn't know who they were. I said, 'Will you please tell me how I can turn this around?' and they doubled up laughing," she recalled.

Once she became proficient, she sailed early in the

morning before the beach and bay became crowded. She continued sailing for the next 30 years, even swimming her capsized boat back to shore when she was 92.

"I didn't think anything of it. I was young acting," she said. "Now I am very old. But in those days, I may have been old by age, but on the other hand, I was very young."

After her retirement, Hanigan traveled through Europe and into Egypt, always planning her own itin-

erary, never signing up for a bus tour. On her most recent trip to London, her son had to rent a car for her--the rental agency refused to rent a car to a 91-year-old.

But at 95, a stroke forced Hanigan off her boat and out of the house off of Bay Road and into Bay Path, where she resides today. Her traveling is limited now mostly to reminiscences of Duxbury, West Roxbury, Europe and the bay, but as she herself said, "I remember it so well."